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ABSTRACT

The Universal Serials and Book Exchange, Inc. (USBE), which serves as a centralized clearinghouse set up in 1948 by several American library and scholarly associations and the Library of Congress, receives, processes, and redistributes surplus and duplicate publications. During the first half of its operating life, USBE concentrated on the distribution of American publications to libraries outside the United States which had lost their collections during the war or were developing a library system for the first time. After 1963, the emphasis shifted to monitoring resource sharing within the United States. By 1973, the USBE focused on international publication again, and currently distributes publications to libraries in all areas of the world, to developing and developed countries alike. In 1977 USBE received 5000 publications each working day from more than 50 countries. (Author/JEG) 5,000 publications each working day from more than 50 countries. (Author/JEG)

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RESOURCE SHARING THROUGH AN EXCHANGE CENTER, USBE

by

A.D. Ball

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Resource sharing has become both a necessity and a hope for libraries throughout the world: a necessity in order to serve reader needs from the geometrically increasing body of world information, and a hope that at some time in the future libraries will have developed a pattern of mutual access to the complete global body of knowledge and information.

In the meantime resource sharing is carried on by libraries in many ways, and at varying depths of activity. Using tools and methods ranging from interchange of lists through union catalogs to sophisticated processing centers and electronic networks, libraries engage for example in interlibrary loan, cooperative acquisitions, and the building of storage centers.

One of the oldest methods of resource sharing among libraries is the practice of exchange. Institutional publications, duplicates, and surplus books and journals are all shared by institutions through direct library-to-library contact or by means of exchange networks. Exchanges are valuable in effecting contacts between institutions and in circulating publications, but they have some traditional difficulties. Especially troublesome is the fact that in the exchange process the libraries supplying the most in the area of publications, space, and manpower, almost always receive much less than they provide.

To alleviate this problem and others, several American library

and scholarly associations joined with the Library of Congress almost thirty years ago to set up the United States Book Exchange, Inc. which would serve as a centralized clearing house for receiving, processing, and redistributing surplus and duplicate publications. Now renamed the Universal Serials and Book Exchange, Inc., the center is known now as "USBE", as it was in 1948 when it first began.

In that year libraries in the United States were not under today's economic and technical pressures to engage in resource sharing. They were, however, accustomed to unilateral exchange agreements through which one library's duplicates or surpluses could help fill another library's needs. There were also a number of local, regional, and national groups which exchanged publications through distribution of lists followed by direct library to library shipment.

The development of a centralized clearinghouse was a natural progression, brought to actuality shortly after World War II when libraries in the United States were flooded with surplus publications while suffering from an acute lack of space and manpower. Some of their problems were alleviated with the creation of a center to which large collections of duplicates could be sent for arrangement, storage, and subsequent redistribution.

The organizations which planned the new center constructed it with some basic patterns which are still a part of USBE's structure. The center would be non-governmental, organized and overseen by the libraries which would use it. These libraries would also pay the cost of the USBE operation, through handling fees charged for each item requested and received by a library. The member libraries would be responsible for keeping up the collection size by contributing freely, as exchange deposits, whatever useful items they were able to send

(without any requirements from USBE as to numbers or schedule) and by paying the cost of sending shipments to USBE.

During the first half of its operating life, USBE concentrated on the distribution of American publications to libraries outside the United States, in countries which had lost collections during the war or were developing a library system for the first time. From 1950 through 1963, a series of contracts from agencies of the United States Government paid the USBE handling fees and the shipping costs on behalf of more than 1700 libraries in 75 countries, to which USBE distributed a total of 3,534,000 periodical issues, books, and documents. In addition to these, USBE deposited another 250,000 publications outside the United States to libraries which paid their own handling fees, as did the U.S. and Canadian libraries which received 2,200,000 items.

Resource sharing through USBE during this time was, numerically, largely a matter of disseminating U.S. publications. The publications received from libraries outside the United States, however, though fewer in number, were important far beyond their numerical percentage. They represented the resource-sharing efforts of libraries with little to spare. They also represented the beginning of a universal interchange of writings which is the ultimate ideal of intercultural understanding as well as of complete international resource-sharing.

The international distribution from USBE's exchange clearinghouse operation continued after 1963, but with some changes in emphasis. By 1964 there was no more contract money available from the U.S. Government, and thereafter USBE dissemination beyond the United States and Canada could go only to those libraries which could pay USBE handling fees in dollars (or by means of Unesco book coupons.)

At this time federal support was increasing for libraries in the United States. For USBE the result was a concentration on monitoring resource sharing within the United States. The percentage of USBE dissemination to domestic libraries grew from 37% in the first 14 years of operation to 82% in the next nine years, through 1972.

From 1973 to the present the emphasis began to move outward again. The proportion of publications sent to libraries outside the United States and Canada increased steadily so that by 1976 it was 40% of the total USBE sent out in that year. Distribution goes to libraries in all areas of the world, to developing and developed countries alike.

In 1977 the USBE operation can be analyzed as the catalytic agent for a deep and broad international flow of resources being shared among libraries. Sixteen hundred and thirty libraries in fifty-eight countries send publications to USBE at the rate of a total of 5,000 each working day. The stock built up by these exchange deposits includes 40,000 periodical titles with 4,000,000 issues, as well as 65,000 books and 35,000 government documents. Health sciences account for 25% of the whole collection, other sciences and technology 30%, social sciences another 25%, arts and humanities 15%, and popular and general works 5%. Publications of U.S. imprint constitute 60% of the whole. Materials available range from books and journals originally sold at high prices to those with low intrinsic value which are therefore very hard to locate elsewhere.

Member libraries looking to this collection for resources they need may send want lists or purchase orders to USBE, or check off needed items on the lists they receive each month from Washington, or make personal selections from the USBE shelves.

Phases of the operation include procedures developed by interaction between USBE and the member libraries over the years. In making exchange deposits, members may save mailing costs by listing titles for a check and quick reply by USBE as to what is in demand. If the library's staff cannot make lists, they may sort their duplicates according to general criteria, using their own discretion. A monthly one-page want list indicates to all members certain titles USBE is looking for to fill urgent needs of members. For large consignments members ask for a shipping date from the USBE schedule. Libraries just beginning, or in an area where surpluses are rare or needed locally, may suspend any exchange deposit for a period of time.

Libraries call on the resources combined at USBE for several kinds of needs. New institutions building up collections find it possible to acquire files of journals, either from the beginning to the current year, or for the last five or ten years through current issues. Most member libraries use the large periodical collection as a source for items needed to fill gaps and to replace damaged or lost issues. Both new and established institutions use the monthly lists of books, government documents, indexes, and other publications to add new items and replace old ones, as well as to acquire out of print materials. In the United States, because of the growing incidence of fees charged by libraries for interlibrary loan, many libraries use the regular USBE single-issue acquisition service as a substitute for interlibrary loan.

In 1977 USBE is planning its role in new developments in resource sharing. It will have a part in the plan for a National Periodicals System now being developed by the U.S. National

Commission for Libraries and Information Science and the Library of Congress. In this connection USBE will sooner or later be able to add some automated procedures to its present operations. As the new relationship is developed, USBE will increase its ability to provide services to library networks as well as to individual institutions. The result of all these activities will be to broaden and deepen USBE's capabilities and services as a nexus for international library resource sharing.

Submitted to the IFLA/UNESCO Pre-Session Seminar for Librarians from Developing Countries, August 30-September 4, 1977, Antwerp University Library by Alice D. Ball, Executive Director, Universal Serials and Book Exchange, Inc.